

IN THE WOMAN'S WORLD

READS PAPER TO WOMEN ON GREAT RELIGIOUS FAITHS

The following paper on the world's great religions was read before the Woman's Board of Missions meeting last Tuesday, by Miss Snow:

PARSUS OR FIRE WORSHIPPERS. Zoroastrianism, or in modern Persian language Zoroaster, was the founder of what is known as the Parsi religion of ancient Persia. He seems to have been born in Bactria (northwestern border of Afghanistan), but most of the legends concerning his history are utterly unreliable. Even the time when he lived is uncertain, but it may be safely estimated to have been as early as 1000 B. C. Indeed, he may have been a contemporary of Moses, who lived from 1571 to 1451 B. C.

The fundamental idea of Zoroaster's creed is its dualism. At the beginning there existed two spirits, Ormuzd, who represented the good, and Ahriman, the evil. These two spirits are always in conflict, but the final triumph of Ormuzd is promised, to comfort the hearts of all the faithful.

Confucianism. While not the founder of a religion, Confucius was a great Chinese sage, who was born in 551 B. C. He is considered the greatest and wisest Chinese, and today every market town has its temple in his honor. Confucius was a great moral teacher, and his greatest teaching was his golden rule: "What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others." He never pretended to be anything more than a man, but that he knew the right way for each man to live, and to be right himself, and for the ruler to rule so as to make men happy and good.

Buddhism. Although it has been widely represented that Buddha was a king's son, the oldest records mention the father as a wealthy land owner. The mother died soon after the birth of her son, who was named Siddhartha, but is often called Gautama. This event took place probably somewhere about 500 B. C. He passed his youth in their capital city. He appears to have been married and to have had one son who became one of his disciples. One of the earliest records represents Siddhartha as having felt deeply, and having often meditated on the weakness and decay of old age, and

the horror of sickness and death. Other early records speak of his having had his hair and beard shaved, putting on the yellow garments of the monks, and going from his home into homelessness. Finally, after a number of years, came the great crisis, when, sitting under a tree, Gautama passed through successive stages of abstraction, until he became enlightened about the transmigration of souls, and the four sacred truths. He had become the Buddha—the awakened—the enlightened.

"Buddha's formal mission, by general consent, opened at Benares. He taught that Narvana may be obtained by the eight fold path: 'Right faith, right resolve, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right thought, right self-concentration.' His doctrine was summed up thus: 'Walk in purity to make an end of all suffering.'"

For forty years he traveled over northern India teaching and making converts. His adherents resembled one another in purity, in the attainment of perfect peace, and in devotion to Buddha. The date of his death is unknown, but it appears to have been when he was about eighty years of age. His funeral was celebrated by nobles with the highest of honor.

Mohammedanism. Mohammed was born in Mecca in 570 A. D. The boy's father died before his birth, and his mother six years later; but he was cared for by his grandfather and then by his uncle. He seems to have lived a quiet and upright life. At the age of twenty-five, he married Khadijah (ka-de-ja), a wealthy widow fifteen years his senior. She was wise, virtuous and attractive, and till her death Mohammed was a kind and loving husband. Khadijah sympathized with her husband in his religious tendencies, and was his first convert. His habit was to retire to a cave in a mountain to pray and meditate. When about the age of forty, what the Moslems regard as his call came to him in one vision and then in others, in which Gabriel appeared and spoke to him the commission of God to preach a new religion. His first revelation, when told to his near friends brought him only ridicule; but at the end of four years, he had forty followers. He then received the command to come forward publicly as a preacher, which he did, exhorting to a moral life, and a belief in one God, whose prophet he was.

Persecution soon arose and he decided to flee from Mecca to the friendly city of Medina which he reached in 622 A. D. This flight or Hieira is the beginning of the Mohammedan era. His position was at once changed, from being a displaced maniac, he became the ruler of the city and of

two powerful Arab tribes. His most important act at this time was the giving permission to carry on war against the enemies of the new faith. This was successfully done, but with great cruelty. His character changed with his successes, and, instead of being a kind hearted and affectionate man, he became sensual, and extremely cruel, especially toward the Jews who refused to receive him as the greater prophet promised by Moses. In his third pilgrimage to Mecca, 632 A. D., he ordered the ceremonies of the great pilgrimage which are still observed.

According to the standards of goodness prevailing in Arabia in the seventh century, Mohammed was a truly good and noble man. He was guilty of bloodshed and sensuality, but these were common Arabian vices. He was in the condition of his time a righteous man. Measured by the character of Christ, he was pitiable and vile. As to his teachings, he taught some great truths, but as a prophet in the sense that Isaiah or Paul were prophets, or even in the sense that Christ was a Prophet, Mohammed was not.

The source of Brahmanism is not in a man, but in a caste. It is not the religion of a Zoroaster, a Confucius, a Mohammed, but the religion of the Brahmins. It can be traced to no individual as its founder or restorer. The Vedas are the oldest works in the Hindu literature and were in existence probably about 15 B. C. It was the bulwark of every Brahmin to learn by heart the Vedas during the twelve years of his student life. The Guru, or teacher, pronounced a group of words and the pupil repeated it after him. After writing was introduced, the Brahmins were strictly forbidden to read the Vedas or to write them.

The earliest leader of whom I could learn was Damanjia who lived from 1017 to 1197 A. D. He was the founder of the Vaishnava sect (the third caste relating to the folk).

Nanak Shah, born near Lahore in 1469 and died in 1538, was the founder of the Sikh movement. (Sikh, a system combining the teachings of the Persians with those of the Hindus, rejecting caste and enjoining purity of life). Originally a Hindu in belief as in birth, he was influenced by the surrounding Mohammedans so far as to denounce idolatry.

Chaitanya. The majority of Vishnu worshippers in Bengal belong to the sect founded by Chaitanya, who was born in Bengal in 1485. He taught that faith and love were more acceptable to the deity than penance and ritual. The first principle was that all the faithful worshippers of Krishna or Vishnu, were to be treated as equals.

Caste was to be subordinated to Krishna.

Kabir (keber), a Hindu religious reformer, was a weaver and probably a Mussulman by birth who lived between 1488 and 1512. His teaching exercised an important influence in upper India in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Rammohun Roy was born in India about 1774. He was the first great modern theistic reformer of India. He believed in one God, especially a personal God. His father was a Brahman, and his grandfather had been an officer of the Mogul emperors. Disgusted with the extravagant Hindu mythology, at sixteen he composed a tract against idolatry. Persecuted, he fled to Benares and then to Tibet, that he might converse with Buddhist priests, being determined to study each religion at its fountain head. He learned several languages in order to read their sacred books. At twenty he returned and resumed his Sanskrit studies, at the same time learning English. After his father's death in 1803, his antagonism to idolatry became more marked, and he set on foot the movement which resulted, in 1830 in abolishing the self-immolation of widows. He formed at Calcutta a society which has since taken the name of Brahmasama. In 1831 he visited England where he spent the remaining two years of his life.

His work was carried on by Debendranath Tagore who organized the first theistic church of India (believing in a God especially a personal God). This has exercised a powerful influence against idolatry, and greatly promoted social reform.

Keshabchandra Sen, the third great theistic reformer of British India, was born in 1838 and died in 1884. Under his leadership the Brahmasama, or theistic church, was led to break with almost all the traditional usages spared by his predecessors, even the distinction of caste.

Judaism and Christianity. It hardly seems necessary for me to take up the life of Moses, the great leader of Judaism; and you all are equally familiar with the miraculous birth, the life, teachings, death and redemption of Jesus the Christ.

The Christian religion, pure and simple, is one left on earth by Christ, the Son of God, all in principle and not in any kind of detail. The religion of Christ, like Christ, ultimately aims for atonement of self, or better, humanity with God, by Christ. One must believe Jesus as his only Saviour before he can be called a Christian, for Jesus came to bring salvation, and salvation is the life of Christianity.

Jesus Christ is as much the representative of human nature as He is the manifestation of God. He is the "Son of man" no less than the "Son of God." In the Old Testament times, God spoke to the people through Moses and the Prophets, but of only one said He at any time, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Jesus the Christ claimed his oneness with the Father, and he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." We quote again his own words, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him."

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